

A SHORT HISTORY OF HOLY CROSS CHURCH

In the early thirteenth century, the manor of Llanblethian covered the central part of the Vale of Glamorgan, with a village and church at Llanblethian itself. The area we now call Cowbridge had just a few houses in the pastureland of the manor, but here, on this 'greenfield site' in the Thaw valley, Richard de Clare— Lord of Glamorgan and lord of the manor of Llanblethian— decided to build a new town. Cowbridge received its first charter as a borough in 1254, and it is reasonable to assume that the church, officially a chapel under the control of the church at Llanblethian, was built about that time. Certainly much of the nave, tower and chancel of the present church dates from the late thirteenth century.

The size and shape of the tower suggest that it was to serve as a watchtower or stronghold in case of attack on the town, but whether an attack ever occurred, we do not know. The church was enlarged in the fifteenth century. The South Llanquian aisle was built in 1473, reputedly as a gift of Lady Anne Neville, wife of Richard, Duke of Gloucester and Lord of Glamorgan (later to be Richard III). The construction of the aisle involved the removal of the massive south wall of the church, and replacing it with the light pillars and arcading which are there today. Also in the fifteenth century, a chantry chapel was built on the north side of the chancel, for a chantry priest to say daily prayers and mass for the soul of the founder, and to teach; the priest lived on the premises. The chantry was terminated in 1548, and the chapel is now used as a meeting room (Taynton Room) and Parish Office.

In 1484, Richard III as Lord of Glamorgan and Morgan granted a chaplaincy to Holy Cross Church. The document, requiring Bishop John Marshall of Llandaff to provide a chaplain 'for the purpose of celebrating divine worship and the holy sacrament in the church or chapel of Holy Cross' with the king's seal in red wax, is preserved in the Glamorgan Record Office. This charter put the previously more haphazard provision of ministers on an official and more regular basis. We know that soon after this an altar in the church was used as a place of solemn and binding agreement — there is a record that in 1516, William Bassett of Treguff conveyed to David Seys of Cowbridge and William ap John of St Hilary, property in Eglwys Brewis — the money to be repaid on the feast of St Andrew in 1526 'in the parish church of Cowbridge on the altar of St Nicholas', between sunrise and sunset. This altar may have been at the east end of the Llanquian aisle. The Reformation saw the removal of the rood loft and other aspects of medieval worship.

Major alterations to the appearance of the church also came in the nineteenth century, with the construction of the present porch, much Victorian restoration, and the removal of the gallery at the west end of the church. In 1925 and 1926 the nave and Llanquian aisle were re-roofed, and the arcade pillars between the nave and the aisle were reconstructed — which is why most of the delicate fifteenth century columns have concrete bases!

There are various wall memorials dating back to the seventeenth century, including those to William Carne of Nash Manor, Judge David Jenkins of Hensol, and the Edmondes family of Old Hall. There are also many memorials to headmasters of Cowbridge Grammar School, and stained glass windows commemorating benefactors of the school, emphasising the close links which exist between school and church. The church also housed the library of the SPCK between 1709 and 1848.

Today the Church faces a major restoration on the roof, tower and interior. In all its history it stands as a spiritual signpost, drawing people to give honour to God in the beauty of holiness.

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